

Serbian language

Serbian (српски / *srpski*, pronounced [sř̩pskiː]) is the standardized variety of the Serbo-Croatian language mainly used by Serbs.^{[9][10][11]} It is the official language of Serbia, co-official in the territory of Kosovo, and one of the three official languages of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, it is a recognized minority language in Montenegro, where it is spoken by the relative majority of the population,^[12] as well as in Croatia, North Macedonia, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic.

Standard Serbian is based on the most widespread dialect of Serbo-Croatian, Shtokavian (more specifically on the dialects of Šumadija-Vojvodina and Eastern Herzegovina^[13]), which is also the basis of standard Croatian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin varieties^[14] and therefore the Declaration on the Common Language of Croats, Bosniaks, Serbs and Montenegrins was issued in 2017.^{[15][16]} The other dialect spoken by Serbs is Torlakian in southeastern Serbia, which is transitional to Macedonian and Bulgarian.

Serbian is practically the only European standard language whose speakers are fully functionally digraphic,^[17] using both Cyrillic and Latin alphabets. The Serbian Cyrillic alphabet was devised in 1814 by Serbian linguist Vuk Karadžić, who created it based on phonemic principles. The Serbian Latin alphabet was designed by Croatian linguist Ljudevit Gaj in 1830.

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Serbian	
српски / <i>srpski</i>	
Pronunciation	[sř̩pskiː]
Native to	Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia
Ethnicity	Serbs
Native speakers	ca. 8 million in the Balkans (2016) ^[1] 0.5–1.5 million abroad ^[2]
Language family	<div>Indo-European<ul style="list-style-type: none">Balto-Slavic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Slavic<ul style="list-style-type: none">South Slavic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Western<ul style="list-style-type: none">Serbo-Croatian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Serbian</div>
Writing system	Cyrillic (Serbian alphabet) <div>Latin (Gaj's alphabet)</div> <div>Yugoslav Braille</div>
Official status	
Official language in	<div><div></div><div>Serbia</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Bosnia and Herzegovina (co-official)</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Kosovo^[a] (co-official)</div></div>
Recognised minority language in	<div><div></div><div>Croatia</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Montenegro</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Hungary^[3]</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Slovakia^[4]</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Czech Republic^{[5][6]}</div></div> <div><div></div><div>North</div></div>

Status in Montenegro

Serbian was the official language of Montenegro until October 2007 when the new Constitution of Montenegro replaced the Constitution of 1992. Amid opposition from pro-Serbian parties,^[28] the Montenegrin language was made the sole official language of the country, and Serbian was given the status of a recognised minority language along with Bosnian, Albanian, and Croatian.^[29]

In the 2011 Montenegrin census, 42.88% declared Serbian to be their native language, while Montenegrin was declared by 36.97% of the population.

Differences between standard Serbian and standard Croatian and Bosnian

Writing system

Standard Serbian language uses both Cyrillic (ћирилица, *ćirilica*) and Latin script (*latinica*, латиница). Serbian is a rare example of synchronic digraphia, a situation where all literate members of a society have two interchangeable writing systems available to them. Media and publishers typically select one alphabet or the other.

Although Serbian language authorities have recognized the official status of both scripts in contemporary Standard Serbian for more than half of a century now, due to historical reasons, the Cyrillic script was made the official script of Serbia's administration by the 2006 Constitution.^[30] However, the law does not regulate scripts in standard language, or standard language itself by any means, leaving the choice of script as a matter of personal preference and to the free will in all aspects of life (publishing, media, trade and commerce, etc.), except in government paperwork production and in official written communication with state officials, which have to be in Cyrillic.

In media, the public broadcaster, Radio Television of Serbia, predominantly uses the Cyrillic script whereas the privately run broadcasters, like RTV Pink, predominantly use the Latin script. Newspapers can be found in both scripts. Outdoor signage, including road signs and commercial displays, predominantly uses the Latin alphabet. Larger signs, especially those put up by the government, will often feature both alphabets.

A survey from 2014 showed that 47% of the Serbian population favors the Latin alphabet whereas 36% favors the Cyrillic one.^[31]

Latin script has become more and more popular in Serbia, as it is easier to input on phones and computers.^[32]

Alphabetic order

The sort order of the *ćirilica* (ћирилица) alphabet:

- Cyrillic order called *Azbuka* (азбука): А Б В Г Д Ђ Е Ж З И Ј К Л Љ М Н Њ О П Р С Т Ћ У Ф Х Ц Ч Џ Ш

The sort order of the *latinica* (латиница) alphabet:

- Latin order called *Abeceda* (абецеда): А В С Ћ Џ D Dž Đ E F G H I J K L Lj M N Nj O P R S Š T U V Z Ž

Grammar

Serbian is a highly inflected language, with grammatical morphology for nouns, pronouns and adjectives as well as verbs.^[33]

Nouns

Serbian nouns are classified into three declensional types, denoted largely by their nominative case endings as "-a" type, "-i" and "-e" type. Into each of these declensional types may fall nouns of any of three genders: masculine, feminine or neuter. Each noun may be inflected to represent the noun's grammatical case, of which Serbian has seven:

- Nominative
- Genitive
- Dative
- Accusative
- Vocative
- Instrumental
- Locative

Nouns are further inflected to represent the noun's number, singular or plural.

Pronouns

Pronouns, when used, are inflected along the same case and number morphology as nouns. Serbian is a pro-drop language, meaning that pronouns may be omitted from a sentence when their meaning is easily inferred from the text. In cases where pronouns may be dropped, they may also be used to add emphasis. For example:

Serbian	English equivalent
<i>Kako si?</i>	How are you?
<i>A kako si ti?</i>	And how are <i>you</i> ?

Adjectives

Adjectives in Serbian may be placed before or after the noun they modify, but must agree in number, gender and case with the modified noun.

Verbs

Serbian verbs are conjugated in four past forms—perfect, orist, imperfect, and pluperfect—of which the last two have a very limited use (imperfect is still used in some dialects, but the majority of native Serbian speakers consider it archaic), one future tense (also known as the first future tense, as opposed to the second future tense or the future exact, which is considered a tense of the conditional mood by some contemporary linguists), and one present tense. These are the tenses of the indicative mood. Apart from the indicative mood, there is also the imperative mood. The conditional mood has two more tenses: the first conditional

(commonly used in conditional clauses, both for possible and impossible conditional clauses) and the second conditional (without use in the spoken language—it should be used for impossible conditional clauses). Serbian has active and passive voice.

As for the non-finite verb forms, Serbian has one infinitive, two adjectival participles (the active and the passive), and two adverbial participles (the present and the past).

Vocabulary

Most Serbian words are of native Slavic lexical stock, tracing back to the Proto-Slavic language. There are many loanwords from different languages, reflecting cultural interaction throughout history. Notable loanwords were borrowed from Greek, Latin, Italian, Turkish, Hungarian, Russian, German, and French.

Serbian literature

Serbian literature emerged in the Middle Ages, and included such works as *Miroslavljevo jevanđelje* (Miroslav's Gospel) in 1186 and *Dušanov zakonik* (Dušan's Code) in 1349. Little secular medieval literature has been preserved, but what there is shows that it was in accord with its time; for example, the *Serbian Alexandride*, a book about Alexander the Great, and a translation of *Tristan and Iseult* into Serbian. Although not belonging to the literature proper, the corpus of Serbian literacy in the 14th and 15th centuries contains numerous legal, commercial and administrative texts with marked presence of Serbian vernacular juxtaposed on the matrix of Serbian Church Slavonic.



Miroslavljevo jevanđelje (The Gospel of Miroslav), a manuscript, ca. 1186

By the beginning of the 14th century the Serbo-Croatian language, which was so rigorously proscribed by earlier local laws, becomes the dominant language of the Republic of Ragusa.^[34] However, despite her wealthy citizens speaking the Serbo-Croatian dialect of Dubrovnik in their family circles, they sent their children to Florentine schools to become perfectly fluent in Italian.^[34] Since the beginning of the 13th century, the entire official correspondence of Dubrovnik with states in the hinterland was conducted in Serbian.^[35]

In the mid-15th century, Serbia was conquered by the Ottoman Empire and for the next 400 years there was no opportunity for the creation of secular written literature. However, some of the greatest literary works in Serbian come from this time, in the form of oral literature, the most notable form being epic poetry. The epic poems were mainly written down in the 19th century, and preserved in oral tradition up to the 1950s, a few centuries or even a millennium longer than by most other "epic folks". Goethe and Jacob Grimm learned Serbian in order to read Serbian epic poetry in the original. By the end of the 18th century, the written literature had become estranged from the spoken language. In the second half of the 18th century, the new language appeared, called Slavonic-Serbian. This artificial idiom superseded the works of poets and historians like Gavriilo Stefanović Venclović, who wrote in essentially modern Serbian in the 1720s. These vernacular compositions have remained cloistered from the general public and received due attention only with the advent of modern literary historians and writers like Milorad Pavić. In the early 19th century, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić promoted the spoken language of the people as a literary norm.

Dialects

The dialects of Serbo-Croatian, regarded Serbian (traditionally spoken by Serbs), include:

- Šumadija–Vojvodina (Ekavian, Neo-Shtokavian): central and northern Serbia
- Eastern Herzegovinian (Ijekavian, Neo-Shtokavian): southwestern Serbia, western half of Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia
- Kosovo–Resava (Ekavian, Old-Shtokavian): eastern central Serbia, central Kosovo
- Smederevo–Vršac (Ekavian, Old-Shtokavian): east-central Serbia
- Prizren–Timok (Ekavian, Old-Shtokavian): southeastern Serbia, southern Kosovo
- Zeta–Raška (Ijekavian, Old-Shtokavian): eastern half of Montenegro, southwestern Serbia

Dictionaries

Vuk Karadžić's *Srpski rječnik*, first published in 1818, is the earliest dictionary of modern literary Serbian. The *Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika* (I–XXIII), published by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts from 1880 to 1976, is the only general historical dictionary of Serbo-Croatian. Its first editor was Đuro Daničić, followed by Pero Budmani and the famous Vukovian Tomislav Maretić. The sources of this dictionary are, especially in the first volumes, mainly Štokavian. There are older, pre-standard dictionaries, such as the 1791 German–Serbian dictionary.

Standard dictionaries

- *Rečnik srpskohrvatskog književnog i narodnog jezika* (Dictionary of Serbo-Croatian standard language and vernaculars) is the biggest dictionary of Serbian and still unfinished. Starting with 1959, 16 volumes were published, about 40 are expected. Works of Croatian authors are excerpted, if published before 1991.
- *Rečnik srpskohrvatskoga književnog jezika* in six volumes, started as a common project of *Matica srpska* and *Matica hrvatska*, but only the first three volumes were also published in Croato-Serbian (*hrvatskosrpski*).
- *Rečnik srpskoga jezika* (ISBN 978-86-7946-004-2) in one volume, published in 2007 by *Matica srpska*, which on more than 1500 pages in A4 format explains more than 85,000 entries. Several volume dictionaries were published in Croatia (for the Croatian language) since the 1990s (*Anić*, *Enciklopedijski rječnik*, *Hrvatski rječnik*).

Etymological dictionaries

The standard and the only completed etymological dictionary of Serbian is the "Skok", written by the Croatian linguist Petar Skok: *Etimologijski rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika* ("Etymological Dictionary of Croatian or Serbian"). I–IV. Zagreb 1971–1974.

There is also a new monumental *Etimološki rečnik srpskog jezika* (Etymological Dictionary of Serbian). So far, two volumes have been published: I (with words on A–), and II (Ba–Bd).

There are specialized etymological dictionaries for German, Italian, Croatian, Turkish, Greek, Hungarian, Russian, English and other loanwords (cf. chapter *word origin*).

Dialectal dictionaries

- Kosovsko-resavski dialect dictionaries:
 - Gliša Elezović, *Rečnik kosovsko-metohiskog dijalekta* I–II. 1932/1935.
- Prizren-Timok (Torlakian) dialect dictionaries:
 - Brana Mitrović, *Rečnik leskovačkog govora*. Leskovac 1984.
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- Momčilo Zlatanović, Rečnik govora južne Srbije. Vranje, 1998, 1–491.
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- Zeta-Pešter dialect:
 - Rada Stijović, Iz leksike Vasojevića. 1990.
 - Drago Ćupić – Željko Ćupić, Rečnik govora Zagarača. 1997.
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- Others:
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See also

- [Language secessionism in Serbo-Croatian](#)
- [Mutual intelligibility](#)
- [Pluricentric Serbo-Croatian language](#)
- [Declaration on the Common Language 2017](#)
- [Dialects of Serbo-Croatian](#)
- [Romano-Serbian language](#) (mix with Romany)
- [Šatrovački](#) (slang form)
- [Serbian language in Croatia](#)
- [Serbian proverbs](#)
- [Abstand and ausbau languages](#)

Notes

- a. Kosovo is the subject of a territorial dispute between the [Republic of Kosovo](#) and the [Republic of Serbia](#). The Republic of Kosovo [unilaterally declared independence](#) on 17 February 2008, but [Serbia continues to claim it](#) as part of its own sovereign territory. The two governments [began to normalise relations](#) in 2013, as part of the [2013 Brussels Agreement](#). Kosovo is currently recognized as an independent state by 97 out of the 193 [United Nations member states](#). In total, [112](#) UN member states recognized Kosovo at some point, of which 15 later withdrew their recognition.

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Herzegovina (30.8%), 265,000 in Montenegro (42.8%), 100,000 in Kosovo, 52,000 in Croatia, and 24,000 in North Macedonia *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 2nd ed.

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External links

- [Swadesh list of basic vocabulary words \(https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Serbian_Swadesh_list\)](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Serbian_Swadesh_list) (from Wiktionary's [Swadesh list appendix \(https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Swadesh_lists\)](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Swadesh_lists))
 - Standard language as an instrument of culture and the product of national history (https://web.archive.org/web/20130623102722/http://www.rastko.org.rs/isk/pivic-standard_language.html) – an article by linguist [Pavle Ivić](#) at *Project Rastko*
 - A Basic Serbian Phrasebook (<http://www.serbiatravelers.org/en/index.php/basics/42-basics/414-serbian-phrasebook>)
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